

Problem Gambling

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Missouri is recognized as an innovative leader in the United States on addressing problem gambling issues.¹ The growing success of Missouri's public awareness program is largely due to the efforts of the Missouri Alliance to Curb Problem Gambling (the "Alliance"), of which the Missouri Gaming Commission is an active member. Formed in 1997, the Alliance brings together diverse groups that have the common interest of working on issues relating to problem gambling.

The Alliance consists of both governing members and participating members.² Governing members share the responsibility of administering the Alliance programs and include: the Missouri Council on Problem Gambling Concerns, Inc., a non-profit advocacy group for problem gamblers; the Missouri Department of Mental Health; the Missouri Gaming Commission; the Missouri Lottery; and the Missouri Riverboat Gaming Association, a private trade organization representing riverboat casino operators. Dedicated to increasing awareness among all age groups about how to gamble responsibly and how to recognize problem gambling, the Alliance plays a key role in Missouri's comprehensive program to attack problem gambling.

Responsible Gaming Education Week

One of the centerpieces of the Alliance awareness program is Responsible Gaming Education Week (RGEW). Missouri was the first state in the country to set aside a week to promote responsible gaming and to educate its residents about the programs available to help problem gamblers. The Alliance placed a special emphasis on underage gambling issues during RGEW 2000 and launched its second awareness and education campaign – an underage gambling prevention program. The most common forms of gambling among youth are sports betting and card games, with interest in Internet gambling on the rise.

During the third annual Missouri RGEW, held August 6-10, 2001, the Alliance highlighted the growing issue of older adult problem gambling, and launched its third awareness and education campaign. Kickoff events included two nationally respected problem gambling experts, Joanna Franklin and Dr. Dennis McNeilly, as featured speakers.

RGEW features training sessions for gaming employees, educational displays for employees and visitors, an intensive advertising campaign to heighten public awareness about problem gambling, and the distribution of an educational video about warning signs for problem gambling and services for problem gamblers.³

RGEW is an excellent tool for increasing public awareness about problem gambling and the availability of programs for problem gamblers. The table on the following page depicts the dramatic increase in the number of persons entering the voluntary exclusion program following RGEW 1999 and RGEW 2000.

¹ Former Alliance Chairman Kevin Mullally was a presenter at the National Council on Problem Gambling's Annual Meeting on June 22, 2001. The program was entitled Public – Private Partnerships to Address Problem Gambling: The Missouri Model Today. Mullally will also present "Minor Problem: How to Combat Underage Gamblers" at the World Gaming Expo on October 6, 2001, and "Youth Gambling – Assessing Risks and Finding Solutions" at the Missouri School Counselors Association fall conference on November 4, 2001.



² Participating members are nonvoting members who wish to participate in Alliance activities. For more information on becoming a participating member, please visit the website at <http://www.888BETSOFF.com/alliance/app.htm> or contact the Gaming Commission.

³ This video can be viewed from the Alliance's website (<http://www.888BETSOFF.com>). Contact the Gaming Commission if you would like a copy of the video.

Year	Average Monthly Applications	Total Number of Disassociated Persons
1996	7	41
1997	20	280
1998	29	631
1999	47	1,200
2000	93	2,315
2001 (Jan-Jul)	112	3,097

Missouri's Voluntary Exclusion Program

Missouri's voluntary exclusion program for problem gamblers was created in 1996 in response to a citizen's request to be banned from the riverboat gambling boats because he found himself unable to control his gambling.⁴ During development of the program, treatment professionals indicated it is essential for problem gamblers to both acknowledge they have a problem and to take personal responsibility for the problem if they are to achieve long-term recovery. The Commission revised the rule and initiated the program consistent with their advice.

Under the provisions of the program, the problem gambler agrees to accept the responsibility of staying out of the excursion gambling boats, that it is not the responsibility of the boats or the Commission to prevent them from entering the gambling boat, and that if they choose to violate the program and are discovered, they will be arrested for trespassing.

Under this program, the Commission requires all licensees to:

- Remove persons in the program from their direct marketing lists;
- Deny people in the program check cashing privileges and participation in player's clubs; and
- Consult the list of people in the program before paying out any jackpot of \$1,200 or more.⁵

There is no procedure for removal once a person is placed on the List of Disassociated Persons. Those who treat problem gamblers are nearly unanimous in their belief that problem gambling is a lifetime condition and that a person is never cured but continues to work at their recovery day by day.

The voluntary exclusion program is not for everyone, nor is it a quick fix for problem gamblers. The vast majority of people who suffer from problem gambling will need counseling or group therapy such as Gamblers Anonymous.

The Commission adopted a rule that took effect May 30, 2001, allowing disassociated persons to enter an excursion gambling boat for the purposes of carrying out the duties

⁴ The program is formally called the List of Disassociated Persons. The provisions of the program can be found at 11 CSR 45-17, et. seq.

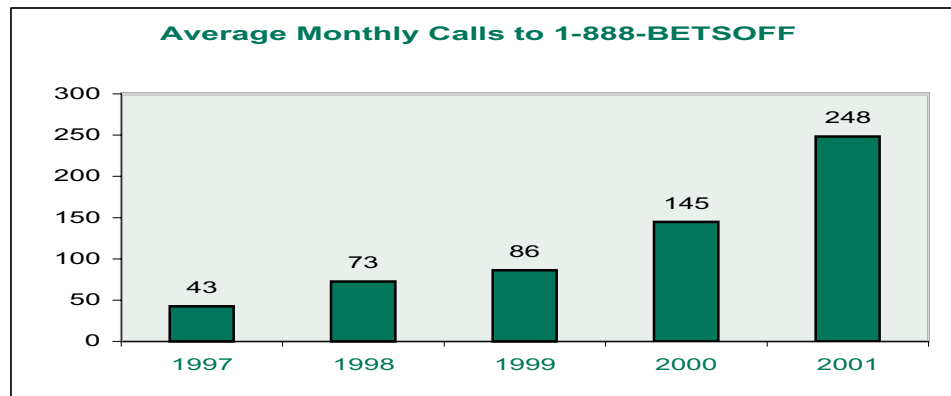
⁵ Internal Revenue Service form W2-G is required for any jackpot of \$1,200 or more. Because this form requires the patron's social security number, the List of Disassociated Persons can be efficiently referenced.

of their employment. This provides a problem gambler with the ability to both utilize the voluntary exclusion program in her/his recovery plan as well as maintain a current source of income at a time when it is most critical due to the financial distress created by her/his destructive gambling behavior.⁶

⁶ The provisions of this rule can be found at 11 CSR 45-17.015.

1-888-BETS OFF Problem Gambling Help Line and Web Site

The efforts of the Alliance to promote 1-888-BETS OFF, Missouri's 24-hour problem gambling help line, have facilitated increased awareness of the help line. During calendar year 2000, the help line received 1,738 calls from problem gamblers and their loved ones. As of July 21, 2001, the help line has already exceeded that number. The chart below shows the increase in the monthly average number of calls received by the help line.



The Alliance also sponsors an Internet website, <http://www.888BETSOFF.com>, that provides information about services for problem gamblers, education and awareness material and research about problem gambling issues.⁷

Counselor Training and Free Treatment

Missouri provides free compulsive gambling treatment for Missouri residents suffering from problem gambling. Open to both the problem gambler and family members, the Department of Mental Health administers this program using a network of private mental health providers who have been certified as compulsive gambling counselors. Until July 2001, the program was paid for by contributions from communities that host gambling activities. With the passage of Senate Bill 902, the state can allocate up to one cent of the \$1 admission fee paid to the state for problem gambling services. The legislation also expanded the services that can be

⁷ Two other excellent online sources for a broad array of research topics include the online journal The Wager, located on the Internet at <http://www.thewager.org> and the Responsible Gambling Council, located at <http://www.responsiblegambling.org>.

provided to include education and outreach.

Problem Gambling Programs Administrator

The Missouri Gaming Commission employs a full-time problem gambling programs administrator to act on behalf of problem gamblers, their families and friends. To our knowledge, Missouri is the only state in the nation whose regulatory agency staffs a full-time problem gambling advocate. The problem gambling programs administrator assists problem gamblers and their families in locating treatment and other resources; oversees the voluntary exclusion program; trains commission staff and agents on issues pertaining to problem gambling and enforcing the voluntary exclusion program; coordinates problem gambling research efforts; conducts public education and outreach efforts; develops collateral materials for education and prevention efforts and assembles information on problem gambling resources throughout the state and continent.

Problem Gambling Speakers Bureau

Speakers are available to give presentations for groups and organizations throughout the state on a variety of problem gambling topics, such as guidelines for responsible gambling, common gambling misconceptions, prevalence rates, risk factors and warning signs of problem gambling, prevention of youth gambling and the resources – including free treatment – available to Missourians who have a gambling problem, and their families.⁸



⁸ For more information about the speakers' bureau or to arrange a presentation, please contact the Gaming Commission. You can also contact the Alliance by e-mail from its website, <http://www.888BETSOFF.com>.